

January 22, 2007

Representative Wells and members of the committee:

My name is Butch Weedon and I have had the honor of leading the effort to keep Montana's firefighters safe and competent for the past twenty-five years.

The Fire Services Training School (FSTS) is attached to MSU Extension and, like Extension, provides outreach educational services statewide. Unlike Extension, we have a very narrowly defined set of students consisting of 12,000 members of local fire companies, 96% of which are volunteers. Our mission: Build the capacity of these fire companies to protect their communities during emergencies. Our goal: reach 80% of fire services with meaningful training four times per year.

Our staff is a small group of very experienced fire service fanatics who work long hours, drive thousands of miles, and provide some of the best fire service training available anywhere. They try to match the commitment made by our firefighters! These trainers play a vital role in the protection of the people, their property and our environment. The skills they teach are not conducive to being taught via "distance learning" technologies. The work they accomplish results in lives saved, hundreds of thousands of dollars saved in insurance premiums, and a reduction in the state's tab for "project fires" which you, our Legislature, is expected to pick up annually. FSTS delivered training in 55 of 56 counties during the past fiscal year. Montana really is our campus!

In October we trained the company officers of the Red Lodge Fire Department. The training consisted of simulations involving a variety of incidents, including a wildfire threatening homes. On November 21st the wind was blowing 60 mph and the "Turkey Fire" took off just outside Red Lodge. More than 30 engines were working the fire within the first hour. Thirty homes were in the flame's path and all survived the fire, thanks to the efforts of local firefighters. The local Chief attributes the FSTS training for keeping their firefighters safe and enabling them to save all of the homes. The fire did not become a "project fire."

In Geyser, a Billings woman is alive today because she was saved after a highway crash by firefighters who had recently been trained by FSTS. Butte firefighters were able to free victims from three recent crashes with skills and tools provided by FSTS. And this committee has heard in the past from a Wolf Point Fire Chief who reported on how two children were saved there because of the training his department had received from FSTS.

**Fire Services
Training School**

Montana State University,
U.S. Department of
Agriculture and Montana
Counties Cooperating.
MSU Extension is an equal
opportunity/affirmative
action provider of
educational outreach.

750 6th St. SW Suite 205
Great Falls, MT 59404
www.montana.edu/wwwfire

T (406) 761-7885
F (406) 268-3735

In Plentywood, as a result of working with an FSTS trainer, the community realized a \$200,000 annual insurance premium saving from commercial property. The town of Clyde Park asked for help with their fire department several years ago. With our help, the town has now gone from an unprotected rating to a grade 7. In dollars, that means instead of paying an insurance premium of around \$2,000 annually for a mobile home, residents now pay around \$200. To business owners, it's meant a 30% reduction in their insurance rates.

These are just a few among many examples of the impact FSTS, in partnership with local firefighters, has made possible with the assistance of the past and present members of this sub-committee. The Administration has included an additional trainer in the proposed budget. Given that additional trainer, FSTS will reach 64% of fire companies with quarterly training, thereby replicating these savings in additional communities across Montana.

What we do saves lives. What we do also saves money. How much we are able to accomplish depends on you, the members of this Committee. I thank you, on behalf of our firefighters, for your support.



Seldon S. Weedon

Director

Fire Services Training School

bweedon@montana.edu

406-771-4328

Fire Services Training School

Our Goal: Quarterly training provided by the Fire Services Training School (FSTS) for 80% of Montana fire services. To accomplish this goal, 6 trainers are required and strategically located throughout the state. FSTS currently has 4 trainers. One additional trainer is included in the Administration's budget.

*Contact: Butch, Director, Fire Services Training School, 771-4328
bweedon@montana.edu*

- ✚ FSTS is an outreach program of the MSU Extension Service.
- ✚ Provides training for volunteer firefighters.
- ✚ Firefighter skill development is not conducive to distance learning technologies.



SAVES \$\$

Insurances rates are reduced as a result of FSTS:

- ✓ Plentywood - \$200,000 annually.
- ✓ Clyde Park - \$1,800 per mobile home annually.
- ✓ Number of "project fires" is reduced by the immediate response of competent, capable, local fire services.
- ✓ 5 to 1 return by FSTS going to local with training vs. them coming to us.

"With the help of FSTS, our department has achieved the best insurance ratings for any volunteer fire department in the nation." **Chief Tom Wood, Libby**

"FSTS, it's simply one of the most valuable tools that the fire service has in the state. I have been able to see us set our standards for training and service higher due to the training and information we've received from the School. The instructors are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic and that helps to stimulate our people to reach for the higher standards that we feel the public both expects and deserves." **Chief Rich Cowger, Columbus Rural**



"The fire officer training provided by FSTS to the Red Lodge Fire Department just weeks before the rapidly spreading Turkey Fire not only kept our volunteers safe, but enabled us to save all the homes that were threatened." **Chief Tom Kuntz, Red Lodge**

Lives saved as a result of FSTS rescue training:

- ✓ White Sulphur Springs attributed by school superintendent.
- ✓ Wolf Creek attributed by fire chief.
- ✓ Geyser attributed by fire chief.

"The Fire School has a greater impact on life safety than anything else the state does." **Chief Scott Waldron, Frenchtown**

"The Fire Service Training School provides us with professional interactive training that makes our members enthused to come to training. They are always excited for training when I tell them FSTS is coming!" **Chief Brad McBratney, Augusta**

The Alberton Train Derailment: An illustration of the importance of training. Of the first two fire companies to respond, only one had received training from FSTS on hazardous materials – members of the other company ended up at the hospital.

SCORE		
Fire Department	A	B
FSTS Training	no	yes
Injuries Received	8	0

Montana's firefighters very much appreciate the support the committee has provided for the Fire Services Training School.